

Special Memorandum 1-67

Latin American Insurgencies Revisited

17 February 1967

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BOARD OF
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SPECIAL MEMORANDUM No. 1-67

LATIN AMERICAN INSURGENCIES REVISITED

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

17 February 1967

SPECIAL MEMORANDUM NO. 1-67

SUBJECT: Latin American Insurgencies Revisited*

SUMMARY

Generally speaking, insurgencies in Latin America have retrogressed over the past year and their prospects for the coming year are not bright. Fidel Castro continues his efforts to stimulate revolution, but the Soviets, as well as most Communist leaders in the area, seem increasingly skeptical about the efficacy of this approach and increasingly inclined to peaceful, united-front tactics. Nonetheless, there is continuing potential for unrest and political disturbances in a number of Latin American countries which do not now have active insurgencies; such conditions are particularly apparent in Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Guyana, Haiti and Panama.

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* This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of National Estimates and coordinated with the Office of Current Intelligence and the Clandestine Services.

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1. In the year since we published NIE 80/90-66: Insurgency in Latin America, the insurgent movements which we discussed therein have not prospered. In general they have taken one step backwards and seem undecided about what to do with the other foot. In part this reflects a lack of popular response; in part the increased effectiveness of government security forces.

2. Although Fidel Castro has been continuing his verbal efforts to stimulate revolutions and has provided some additional aid and training, this has neither given major new impetus to already active insurgencies, nor caused any new one to take the field. Fidel has quite candidly explained the why of this: simply that Latin American Communists presently include too few bold revolutionaries and too many pseudorevolutionists, defeatists and theoreticians. His approach is direct and simple: stop talking, get out there and fight, and this action will sooner or later create the conditions for success.

3. To this, most other Latin American Communist leaders wearily reply that you can't start a successful revolution at the drop of a "barbudo." The main job, the orthodox Communists say, is to develop revolutionary consciousness in people who are still unready for revolution: taking to the hills without this

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extensive groundwork is futile and likely to end in ignominious defeat, as it did in Peru. Rejecting the universality of Fidel's theory, these Communist leaders cite the vast differences among countries and conditions for revolution. Even one advocate of armed struggle, a Guatemalan Communist writing in the October issue of Problems of Peace and Socialism, said "we believe that the people and their vanguard, the Marxist-Leninist party, must find their own path of revolution. . . . The specific national conditions, historical traditions, and concrete situations in the different countries lay their imprint on each national revolutionary process."

4. Soviet policy in Latin America appears to reflect increasing doubts about the efficacy of armed struggle as a revolutionary tactic in most Latin countries. To Castro's dismay, the USSR has sought to expand its commercial and diplomatic relations with Latin countries, including the target of Fidel's more virulent propaganda, the Frei government of Chile. Moreover, Soviet propaganda emphasizes the political approach. In a review of the world Communist situation, for example, a January Pravda article appraised the prospects for Communism in Latin America without mentioning Cuba or Fidel. Omitting mention of any

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insurgent groups or even countries in which there are going insurgencies, it praised the growing membership of Latin American Communist parties and cited Communist representation in Panamanian, Uruguayan, and Chilean parliaments. Under the general heading, Asia, Africa, and Latin America -- Resistance to Neocolonialism, armed struggle was referred to as a means for achieving political independence, but no specific reference was made to it in the Latin American context. The stress in the case of Latin America was placed instead on the necessity to work for the unity of the workers' class and the "broadest possible social forces."

5. In late 1965-early 1966 there were four fairly active ("limited operational" in the language of NIE 80/90) insurgencies in Latin America -- in Venezuela, Guatemala, Colombia, and Peru. The one in Peru was quickly defeated and its organization largely destroyed. The one in Colombia we described at that time as having "barely emerged from the incipient stage;" since then it seems to have receded slightly. Endemic banditry continues to pose more of a problem in the Colombian countryside than do Communist guerrillas.

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The Venezuelan Case

6. After five years the Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN) in Venezuela are still functioning, but are still badly split and have been hurt by the arrest of many leaders. Two hard line factions, one called the Movement of the Revolutionary Left and the other led by FALN dissident Douglas Bravo, between them number around 300 men. They are trying separately to stem pressure from the soft line in the Venezuelan Communist Party to forsake armed struggle and return to political action, and to this end, are both supported by Fidel Castro, though it is clear that Bravo is his favorite revolutionary. Last July the Bravo group was aided by a morale-boosting infusion from Cuba of 20-30 additional Venezuelan insurgents. In November and early December it rekindled revolutionary embers by launching a series of attacks on property and on key officers of the armed forces. Its evident aim with the latter tactic was to widen the breach between Venezuelan military leaders and the Leoni government, and perhaps to provoke the military to seize power.

7. A golpe was probably averted by the Leoni government's willingness to accede to military demands for a crackdown on

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insurgency. Its amnesty campaign (which had sought to lure the half-hearted out of the hills) was cancelled, constitutional guarantees were suspended, and the Central University at Caracas was raided. Yet even this show of force did not fully placate the military forces. They still charge that the government is not giving them adequate support in the anti-guerrilla effort and they demand that sterner measures be taken. Other factors, such as antipathy to politicians and to the government's policy of favoring officers sympathetic to the ruling Democratic Action Party, have added to military discontent.

8. The Soviet Union, in an apparent reversal of its past policy of support for the armed struggle in Venezuela, now seems to be favoring the soft line. From 1962 to early 1966 it had supported the FALN with funds and propaganda, fearing perhaps that to ignore this movement would be to risk increased Chinese influence in Latin America. There was less reason for such fear after Fidel's relations with the Chinese had so markedly cooled. The Soviet decision to stop their aid also came at a time of deep internal dissidence within the FALN, which seemed to dim its prospects. Although the Soviet radio and press have not officially condemned armed struggle in Venezuela, their once

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extensive propaganda in its favor has ceased, and certain party publications have featured articles by advocates of the soft line. At the time of Bravo's renewal of violence in late 1966, the USSR was negotiating with Venezuela for diplomatic relations, apparently in hopes of exporting finished goods rather than revolution.

The Guatemalan Case

9. In Guatemala neither the Castro-backed Armed Rebel Forces (FAR) nor Yon Sosa's Revolutionary Movement of 13 November (MR13N) has been able significantly to improve its position in the last year. The military did not prevent the Mendez Montenegro government from taking office; two top FAR leaders have been killed; and, in spite of some efforts at unification, the two insurgency movements remain estranged from each other. The FAR's leaders have complained about shortages of arms, food, and other supplies, and have criticized some of their patrons in the Guatemalan Workers' Party (pro-Moscow Communist) for lacking militancy. The major change in the insurgency situation, however, has resulted from the Guatemalan Army taking to the field in a sustained effort which, for the first time, has managed to put the guerrillas on the defensive.

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As a result of military operations the insurgent forces, whose strength had risen in the early part of 1966, have been depleted somewhat -- to about 250 activists in the FAR and 100 in the MRLJN.

10. To a far greater extent than in Venezuela, however, the Guatemalan insurgency has raised the political temperature and caught the mildly reformist Mendez government in a squeeze play between guerrilla and "gorilla." Left wing terror and the oligarchy's antipathy to the Mendez government has begotten right wing terror. Elements from Castillo Armas' old party, the National Liberation Movement (MLN) have undertaken their own counter-guerrilla operations and have tried to win the army over to their side. For the moment Mendez has been able to survive coup plots and keep the right from being a current threat. Ordering the troops to the field was instrumental in easing tensions, but the chances for a golpe from the right will increase if the insurgency drags on.

11. Neither of the two insurgency groups seems to be getting much aid from outside the country. Though Yon Sosa may be receiving trifling amounts of aid from Trotskyites in Mexico; Castro no longer provides it and the Soviets never did. Evidence of outside support for the FAR is also sketchy; it

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has apparently relied on ransoms from kidnappings for much of its financing. The most recent clear indication of Cuban material support came last September, when the Mexican police broke up a ring connected with the Cuban embassy in Mexico which had been smuggling US-made rifles into Guatemala since early February of 1966. The Soviets, as far as we know, have not been providing material assistance; however, since the Moscow-oriented Guatemalan Workers' Party continues to back the FAR insurgency efforts, the USSR seems tacitly to be supporting them too.

Insurgency Prospects

12. Of the four insurgencies which were relatively active a year ago, there seems little chance during the coming year of resurgence of the one in Peru, and the one in Colombia is unlikely to reach serious proportions. During this time period, neither the insurgency in Venezuela nor that in Guatemala will become strong enough to seize power itself, but one or the other might provoke a military seizure of power.

13. Castro and Che Guevara have contended that a military coup inevitably and nearly automatically produces a situation

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favorable to the ultimate success of insurgency. Actually, the room for slippage between cup and lip in the process is very large. For Castro's approach is based on what transpired in Cuba, where his revolution was without a Communist label and had extensive middle class support. Ironically, what happened in Cuba has had something of the effect of an inoculation against revolution elsewhere in the area; indeed, Che himself has made the point that, because one Cuba happened, the chances of a second Cuba have become smaller rather than greater.

14. One problem that could face insurgents after they had provoked a military golpe would be an increased military effort against them -- possibly one of such scope and effectiveness that it wiped them out. Under these conditions, replacement insurgents would be hard to find; most Latin Americans do not make willing martyrs.

15. It does not necessarily follow, however, that a military takeover would mean an extended period of harsh and repressive rule which would soon alienate the population. Only certain of the military governments of Latin America have behaved like that; others have been constructive in various ways,

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and the dedication of Latin Americans to representative institutions is not so strong that they are immediately and automatically alienated by a military leadership. Perhaps the most important weakness for the insurgents after a golpe is that they, and Communist movements as a whole, have so far built up very little backing and sympathy among the masses in Latin America -- they particularly lack support among the rural peasantry. They are now increasing their efforts to gain such support in a number of countries, but at best this will be a long run process.

16. The kind and extent of popular reaction to a golpe would, of course, vary from country to country. Where the right is entrenched and political institutions are still relatively weak, as in Guatemala, a golpe probably would not benefit the insurgents to the extent that it might in Venezuela where there is broader support for present political institutions and where a military regime would be likely from the beginning to encounter active opposition from a number of groups in the population.

17. In sum, prospects in the short run are not bright for any of the insurgencies presently active. The potential for violence and unrest -- which could conceivably develop into

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insurgency -- is probably greater in some chronically unstable countries such as Bolivia or Haiti, which are not now plagued by active insurgencies. There is, of course, variation over time as to which countries may be particularly vulnerable.* For the coming year we would list, along with Bolivia and Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Guyana, and Panama.

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SHERMAN KENT
Chairman

* A year ago in NIE 80/90 the countries we listed in this category were Bolivia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, and Panama. The governments in Ecuador and Honduras now seem slightly more stable and the potential insurgents there less effectual. Guyana, on the other hand, has become cause for greater concern; it became independent in May 1966 and the British security force was withdrawn.

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